

Utilities consider expanding coal-fired plant

By The Associated Press

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ROCK SPRINGS - Expansion plans are being considered for the coal-fired Jim Bridger Power Plant, officials with one of the plant's owners said.

The plant, about 25 miles east of Rock Springs, is owned by PacifiCorp and Idaho Power. It has four electrical generating units that supply power to customers in six Western states, including Wyoming.

The proposed expansion would involve adding another unit onto the plant that could generate between 600 and 800 megawatts of electricity, PacifiCorp spokesman Dave Eskelsen said. It would be the first new generating unit built at the plant since it opened in the 1970s.

Eskelsen said no decision has been made on whether to go ahead with the plan.

Officials estimated the project, if approved by the companies and permitted by various government agencies, could cost \$800 million or more.

The plant burns coal from the adjacent Bridger Coal and nearby Black Butte mines. It can produce enough power to supply more than 1 million residential customers each day, according to company figures.

The plant employs around 390 full-time workers and contractors.

Eskelsen said the company is developing various options, including coal-fired, gas-fired and wind-powered electrical generation, to meet projected future power supply needs.

"We're taking a look at what customer demand is going to be and what kinds of resources are out there that could either be purchased or constructed to meet that demand," Eskelsen said.

"There are people that question the need for new power plants and there are people that question whether we should still be using coal ... but ultimately we see the need for new projects as very real," he said. "And we see the continued use of coal for the near future as probably the best option in terms of costs and risks."